

In the Public Interest

Volume 8 | Number 1

Article 2

4-1-1988

From the Editors

In the Public Interest

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/itpi>

Recommended Citation

In the Public Interest, *From the Editors*, 8 Buff. Envtl. L.J. 2 (1988).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/itpi/vol8/iss1/2>

This Front Matter is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in In the Public Interest by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.

From the Editors

Cover Page Footnote

Illustration by Michael Gelen

FROM THE EDITORS

And, of course, I am afraid — you can hear it in my voice — because the transformation of silence into language and action is an act of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger. But my daughter, when I told her of our topic and my difficulty with it, said, “Tell them about how you’re never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there’s always that one little piece inside of you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don’t speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth.”

In the cause of silence, each one of us draws the face of her own fear — fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the very visibility without which we cannot truly live. Within this country where racial difference creates a constant, if unspoken, distortion of vision, black women have on the one hand always been highly visible, and so, on the other hand, have been rendered invisible through the depersonalization of racism. Even within the women’s movement, we have had to fight and still do, for that very visibility which also renders us most vulnerable, our blackness. For to survive in the mouth of this dragon we call America, we have had to learn this first and most vital lesson — that we were never meant to survive. Not as human beings. And neither were most of you here today, black or not. And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is the source of our greatest strength. Because the machine will try to grind you into dust anyway, whether or not we speak. We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and our selves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned, we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we still will be no less afraid. . . . [I]t is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken.

Audre Lorde

THE CANCER JOURNALS [1980] at 21-3.

124 WAS QUIET. Denver, who thought she knew all about silence, was surprised to learn hunger could do that: quiet you down and wear you out.[. . .]

The weather was warm; the day beautiful. It was April and everything alive was tentative. Denver wrapped her hair and shoulders. In the brightest of the carnival dresses and wearing a stranger’s shoes, she stood on the porch of 124 ready to be swallowed up in the world beyond the edge of the porch. Out there where small things scratched and sometimes touched. Where words could be spoken that would close your ears shut. Where, if you were alone, feeling could overtake you and stick to you like a shadow. Out there where there were places in which things so bad had happened that when you went near them it would happen again. Like Sweet Home where time didn’t pass and where, like her mother said, the bad was waiting for her as well. How would she know these places? What was more — much more — out there were white people and how could you tell about them? Sethe said the mouth and sometimes the hands. Grandma Baby said there was no defense — they could prowl at will, change from one mind to another, and even when they thought they were behaving, it was a far cry from what real humans did.

“They got me out of jail,” Sethe once told Baby Suggs.

“They also put you in it,” she answered.

“They drove you ’cross the river.”

“On my son’s back.”

“They gave you this house.”

“Nobody gave me nothing.”

“I got a job from them.”

“He got a cook from them, girl.”

“Oh, some of them do all right by us.”

“And every time it’s a surprise, ain’t it?”

“You didn’t used to talk this way.”

“Don’t box with me. There’s more of us they drowned than there is all of them ever lived from the start of time. Lay down your sword. This ain’t a battle; it’s a rout.”

Remembering those conversations and her grandmother’s last and final words, Denver stood on the porch in the sun and couldn’t leave it. Her throat itched; her heart kicked — and then Baby Suggs laughed, clear as anything. “You mean I never told you nothing about Carolina? About your daddy? You don’t remember nothing about how come I walk the way I do and about your mother’s feet, not to speak of her back? I never told you all that? Is that why you can’t walk down the steps? My Jesus my.”

But you said there was no defense.

“There ain’t.”

Then what do I do?

“Know it, and go on out the yard. Go on.”

Toni Morrison

BELOVED [1987] at 239, 43-44.

